

Los Angeles Times

Around the Galleries
Friday, April 11, 2008

A Menagerie In Contentment

By David Pagel
Special to *The Times*



In a city where people pay for manicures for their cats and take their dogs to pet shrinks, hotels and spas, it's not all that outlandish to imagine them buying art for their furry companions. Those days are not yet upon us. But true art is always ahead of the curve, so if you want to see what may be in store for the future, head over to **Macha Suzuki's** L.A. solo debut at the Sam Lee Gallery. Five sculptures by the 29-year-old, Japanese-born, L.A.-based artist come from so far out in left field that they seem to be more suited for pets than people – and all the better for it.

Simple contentment is the dominant emotional tone of Suzuki's handsomely handmade animals, which inhabit artificial settings that resemble customized fusions of works by Constantin Brancusi, Isamu Noguchi, Yoshitomo Nara and Evan Holloway. Unflinching loyalty and unapologetic dependence are also evoked, as is the unflappable serenity of creatures that gracefully avoid the daily dramas humans often get caught up in, making mountains of molehills and tempests in teacups.

Part of the power of Suzuki's sedate, well-adjusted sculptures resides in their capacity to translate the virtual space of painting into three dimensions.

Sometimes he does this by treating the space within his pedestals (visible through the fence-like slats of their sides) as dioramas filled with undersea life or pulsating light shows. At other times, Suzuki charges what we usually think of as negative space with electrifying energy. The digitally printed leaves on the tree in "Plan B" flutter with the faintest breeze. And the 72 arrows that surround the fluffy white sheep in "Minor Threat" form a perfect circle or menacing halo, suggesting geometric perfection as well as St. Sebastian and the Lamb of God.

The birds, cows, cats and fish in Suzuki's low-tech, cartoon-style sculptures inhabit a peaceable kingdom whose artificiality enhances its innocence and fragility. That's the world where pampered pets live, where slow, steady rhythms provide tiny islands of respite from the fast-paced craziness of modern life.

Sam Lee Gallery, 990 North Hill Street, No. 190, (323) 227-0275, through May 10. Closed Sunday through Tuesday, www.samleegallery.com.